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Are Rage Comics Really Comics?

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Are Rage Comics Really Comics?

A couple of years ago, some of my undergraduate students and I were talking about comics, and one of them mentioned rage comics. I hadn't heard of that before, so I was grateful to learn about them. In the interest of full disclosure, I am not a Redditor, and I don't ever spend time on Reddit. But in August 2012, when I finally upgraded to a smart phone from my previous dumb phone, I downloaded the Rage Comics app. Every now and again, when I'm on the bus headed to work, I scroll through some of these comics.

Most of the time, rage comics convey exaggerated levels of emotion regarding an event or a situation. The following comic captures this relationship very clearly. A common situation (somebody is trying to sleep) becomes annoying (a single cricket chirping) and prevents the person from accomplishing a goal (getting a good night's rest). In this case, annoyance is represented as rage.

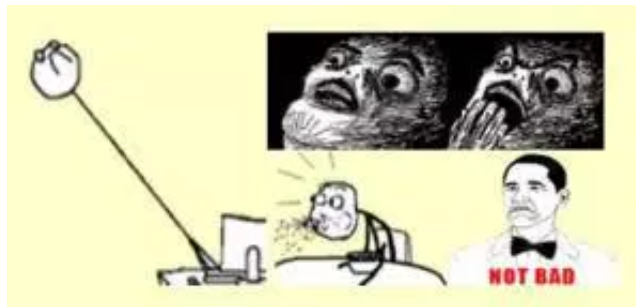


(<https://pencilpanelpage.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/troll-cricket-2012-fall.png>)
troll cricket

In the final panel, the character says "FFFFFFFUUUUUUUUUUUUU," which is sometimes represented as f7u12. This is also the name of the rage comics link on Reddit.

Rage Comics consist largely of prefabricated images. These are stock images available on the Reddit website as well as related sites. The images are highly predictable in their meanings, and users are free to borrow the images and adapt their appearance as they see fit.

One category of emotion found in rage comics is 'surprise.' I have aggregated some of the more common images, below.



(<https://pencilpanelpage.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/surprise-collage.jpg>)
conventions of surprise in rage comics

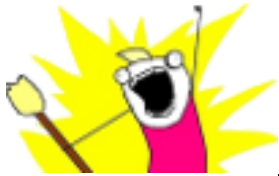
Notable here is the category of “surprise” and the range of intensity of that emotion represented in each image. Both the convention of the long neck and the convention of the gasp convey much stronger emotional responses than the term “surprise” may indicate. But this is often the point of rage comics, to heighten the representations of the emotions. On the other hand, many of the images don’t “overdo” the emotion, like the “Not Bad Obama” image. In any event, the images serve to make commentary on a situation.

The rage comic below describes a situation that many people have experienced. Playing this arcade-style “claw game” is notoriously difficult. How much money has been spent in these machines trying to claim a tiny plush toy or other kind of gadget from the treasure pile? Notice in panel 4 the word ***drop!***.



(<https://pencilpanelpage.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/claw-game-fail-2012-fall.png>)
claw game fail

At the end of the game, when we almost always drop the treasure, do we feel rage? Do the red eyes of the character in the last panel resound with readers because of realism or because of exaggeration? It would also be easy to change the ending of the comic. If on the off chance that we do succeed in claiming our treasure, we could use an image from the ‘VICTORIOUS’ category of the rage comics conventions, as follows:



(<https://pencilpanelpage.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/victorious-1.png>)

(<https://pencilpanelpage.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/victorious-1.png>) victorious

Should Rage Comics be considered comics? Are they sequential art? Conversely, are they simply “cut and paste” images that should not in any sense be compared to “comic art”? Do they mock the loving care that many (all?) comics artists devote to their creations? Is this an up-to-date color-by-number gimmicky analogue for the internet generation?



Posted by [Frank Bramlett](#) on [November 22, 2012](#) in [Uncategorized](#).

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About Frank Bramlett

Until June 2014, I am a visiting lecturer in the English Department at Stockholm University, where I offer seminars in Sociolinguistics; Language and Gender; and Language and Comics; among others. For Fall 2014, I will return to the English Department at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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